Archeological Investigations at the Hoffman House Gettysburg National Military Park Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

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MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

In 1995, Gettysburg National Military Park proposed reconstruction of the lean-to addition of the Hoffman House for use as park offices. Excavation of two test units within the construction area did not identify significant archeological resources that would be impacted by construction. As a result, the proposed action had "no effect" on archeological resources.

INTRODUCTION

The Hoffman House (List of Classified Structures GETT-229) is located immediately adjacent to Taneytown Road, one mile south of Gettysburg (Figure 1). Located on the historic battle-era Soloman Cassatt Farm, and later owned by Fantasyland, Inc., the house currently consists of a two-story frame with a cross-gable extension, lean-to addition, and front and side porches (LCS Field Inventory Report, 1975). The house has a full cellar and a stone foundation. Originally believed to date from the late nineteenth-century, the main block of the house possibly dates to the mid-nineteenth century and may have been present during the Battle of Gettysburg (LCS Report 1995). Photographic evidence documents the Hoffman House's presence as early as 1882.

Oral history collected by park staff suggest that large quantities of fill were added to the west yard sometime in the early twentieth century (Kathy Harrison: personal communication). This may have also extended into the east yard project area.

In 1995, Gettysburg National Military Park proposed adaptive reuse of the structure as park offices, including reconstruction of the lean-to addition which had deteriorated beyond repair. Construction required a concrete masonry unit foundation along the east margin of the addition to receive the floor joists and end wall. Removal of the addition revealed a filled-in cistern in the southwest corner (Figure 2). Archeological investigations were conducted to determine if the proposed construction would effect any signficant archeological resources. The results were then used to evaluate the results for evidence for an early construction date for the Hoffman House.

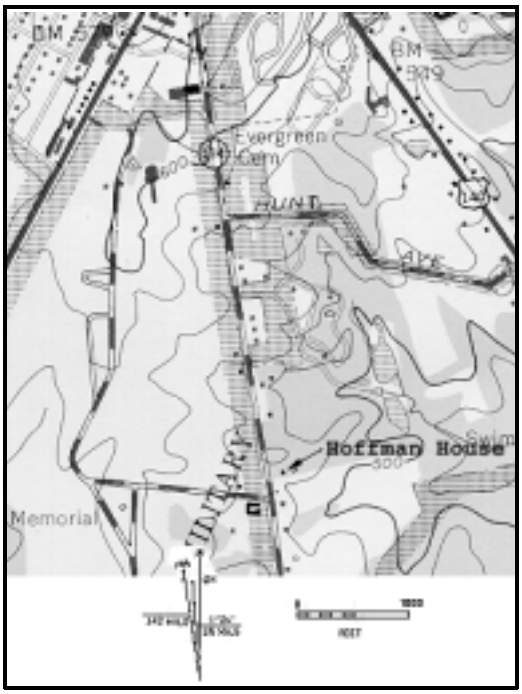

Figure 1: Location of Hoffman House*.

*Detail from Gettysburg Quadrangle, U.S.G.S. 1:2400 Series (topographic). Photorevised 1968 and 1973

Figure 2: Detail of Cistern, Looking West.

FIELD INVESTIGATIONS

Data Collection Standards

Archeological investigations at the Hoffman House were performed by the author on February 8 and 9, 1995. Excavation in sub-freezing weather was conducted to facilitate the park's construction schedule. Archeological investigations were conducted in accordance with "Archeology and Historic Preservation: Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology" as well as the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's "Bureau for Historic Preservation Guidelines for Archeological Investigations." To ensure uniform data recovery, all excavated soils were passed through one-quarter inch hardware cloth. Portions of Test Unit 2, Stratum 1 contained frozen soils and were not screened, but were examined closely for the presence of cultural materials. Excavation proceeded by natural stratigraphy with all artifacts from the same provenience placed in plastic bags. Archeological profiles and floor plans were drawn in the field as warranted, with all drawings redrafted for this report. Original notes, photographs, drawings, and artifacts are on file at Gettysburg National Military Park. Soil descriptions are approximate; the Munsell color chart was misplaced during this investigation.

Site Layout and Orientation

Access to site soils was limited by the continuous concrete walkway around the addition (Figure 3). This walkway had been used as the foundation for the addition, portions of which were to be removed to allow for construction of the new concrete foundation. Removal of two segments within the proposed construction area allowed for excavation of Units 1 and 2. The brick cistern was located in the southwest corner of the addition, and a deep, dry-lain well was located in the southeast corner. Both of these features were to be preserved in place and not effected by construction and as a result were only casually examined.

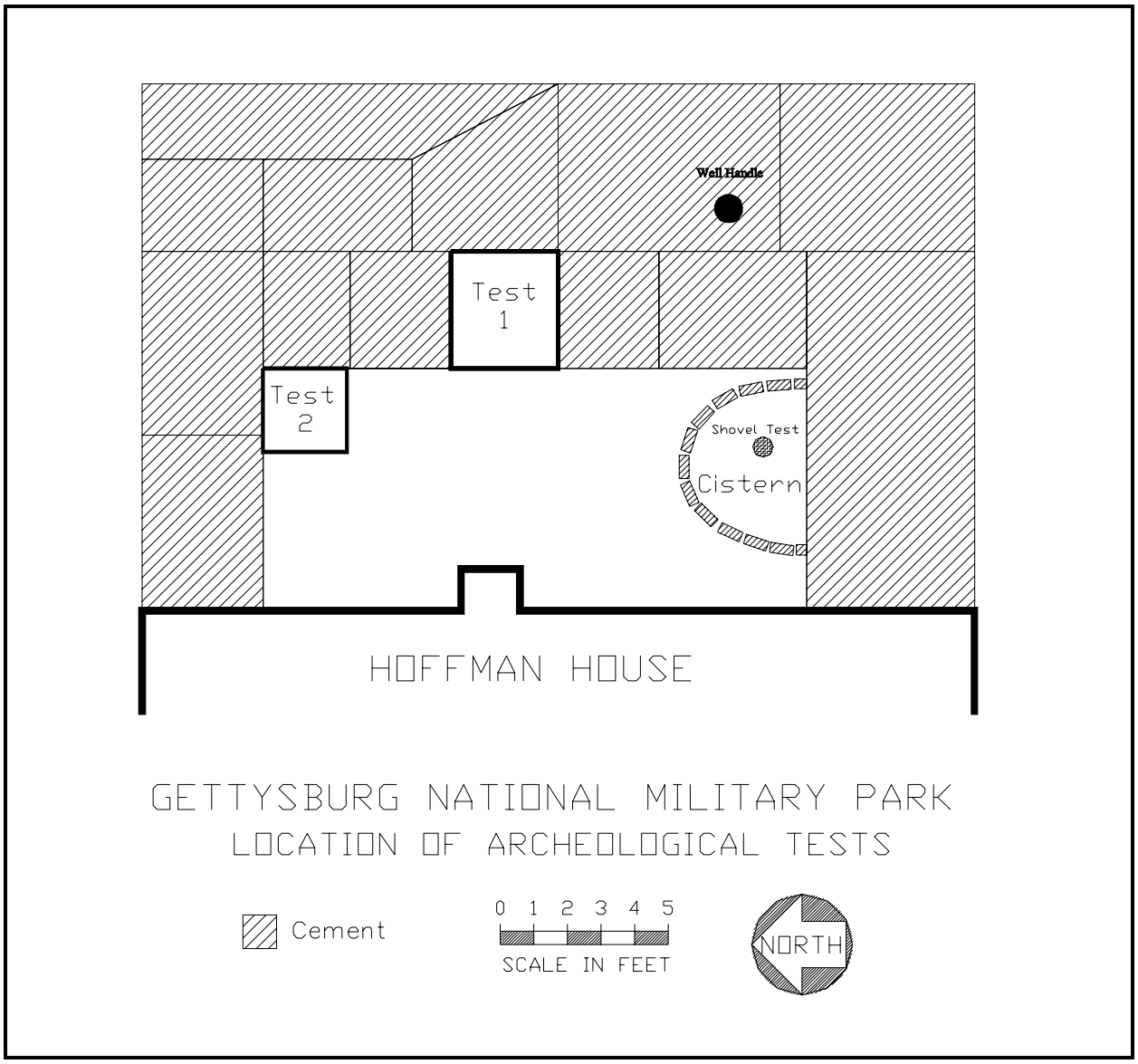

Figure 3: Plan of Investigations, East End of Hoffman House.

Archeological investigations were designed to address the following questions within the proposed construction program:

1) Would the proposed construction effect archeological resources that contribute to the National Register eligibility of the property or the house?
2) What are the construction dates of the exposed features (the well and the cistern?
3) When was the Hoffman House constructed?

Results

Cistern: The cistern is roughly circular, 5.4 feet in diameter. It is constructed of a single row of bricks in stretcher bond, parged on the interior with portland cement. Examination of the exposed exterior indicates the bricks were set in a portland cement mixture as well. The surface interior of the cistern is filled with fine gravel while the visible exterior has been backfilled with brickbats and medium (0.25 - 0.5 foot diameter) stones. There is a significant void between the cistern and the southwest corner of the house; at least 2.33 feet deep from the top of the slab. It is filled with a large chunk of powdery material (possibly lime), brickbats, sewer pipe, and stones. This deposit continues to the ashlar sedimentary stone that forms the foundation of the Hoffman House. A pipe connects the cistern with the downspout of the house (southwest corner of the addition, southeast corner of the house). A single shovel test was excavated in roughly the center of the cistern. Measuring approximately one and one-half feet in diameter, it contained granular modern fill materials to at least 3.45 feet below the top of the cement slab. The fill became too unstable to excavate below that depth and excavation was suspended. The fill materials contained no artifacts and cannot be dated. Visual examination of the soils around the cistern that had possibly been redeposited from its construction did not reveal artifacts dating before the twentieth century. Common use of Portland cement dates from the last quarter of the nineteenth century and dates the cistern (or at least repairs to its upper portion) to that time. Excavation of the installation trench for the cistern was not attempted since proposed construction would not impact that feature.

Proposed Foundation Wall: Two test units were excavated in the proposed location of the new foundation wall for the reconstructed lean-to addition.

Test 1: Test 1 was located midway along the east wall of the addition. It was placed to examine the potential for information relating to the construction of the well, and for any pre-war occupation. Measuring 3.5 feet east/west and 3.0 feet north/south, it exhibits somewhat complex strata. The surface is defined by a cement slab on three sides (east, north, and south). Immediately beneath the slab is a layer of grey humic soil. This zone appears across the entire west profile, and partially in the north and south profiles (Figure 4). It is absent in the east profile. On three faces (north, east, and south) this is followed by a layer of banded, apparently mixed, soils. Beneath this on the eastern one-third of the unit is a layer of light yellowish-brown sandy clay. To the west, this layer is absent,

replaced by sterile yellowish-brown clay. At 2.09 feet below surface, gray humic soil extended across the entire unit. At the depth of 2.3 feet, a large portion of the unit is covered with a large stone; the grey humic soil is apparently the result of organic materials percolating to the depth of the stone (Figure 6). No artifacts were observed in any of the soils in the entire excavation.

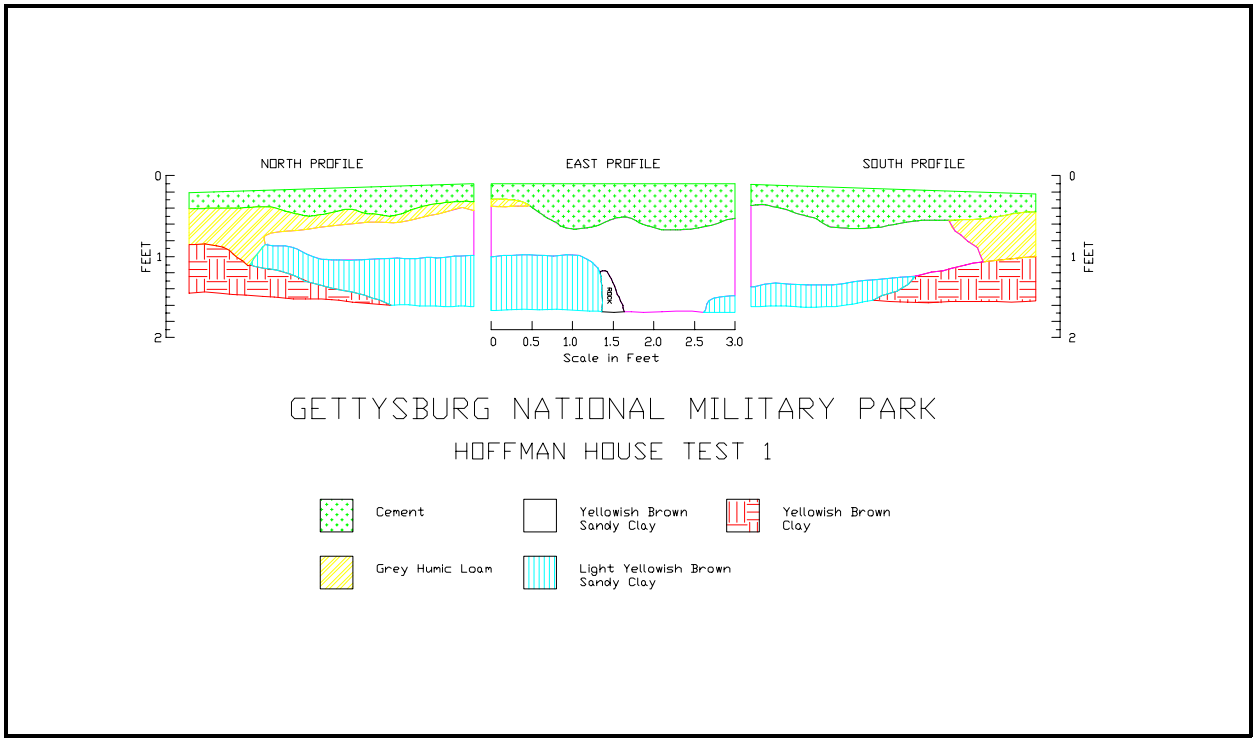

Figure 4: North, South, and East Profiles of Test 1.

Test 1 was suspended at 2.3 feet below surface, deeper than the proposed depth of construction for the new foundation wall. The unit did not contain any definitive evidence regarding the construction of the well, although disturbed soils continued to near the base of the unit. It is possible, though unlikely, that the light yellowish-brown sandy clay represents the irregular boundary of the construction trench for the well. The well's

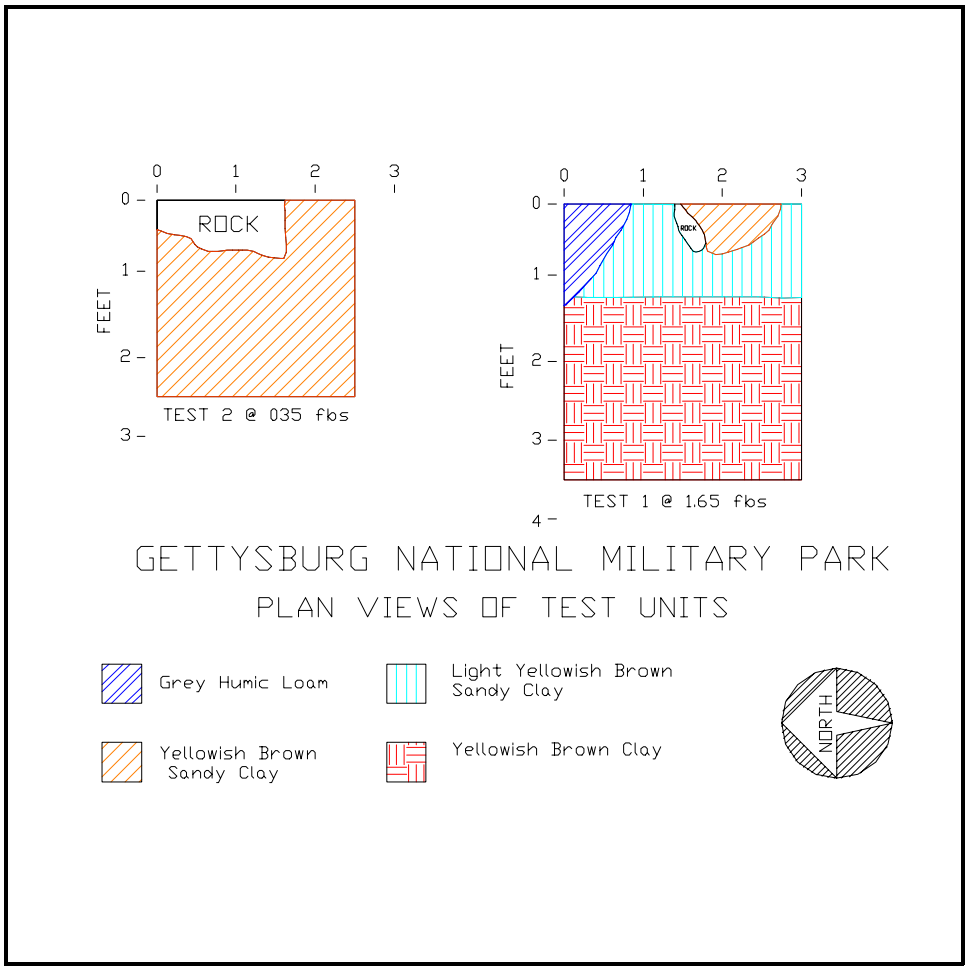

Figure 5: Plan Views of Tests 1 and 2.

depth (>10 feet) would suggest the presence of a very large oval construction trench. However, the shape of the soil intrusions in Test Unit 1 are not consistent with such a construction.

Test 2 was located midway along the northern wall of the addition and measured 2.5 feet square. A row of gas-fired brick lay beneath the cement walkway, representing the footing for the recently removed addition. The immediate surface consisted of yellowish-brown clay which was frozen. The frozen soil was removed with a digging bar to the depth of 0.35 feet below the surface (see plan view at 0.35 feet below surface; drawing made at base of frozen layer). Examination of the frozen soil during removal did not identify any artifacts to date this stratum.

Upon removal of the frozen layer, the yellowish-brown sandy clay beneath the frozen soil (beginning at 0.35 feet below surface)

was designated Zone 2. Four artifacts were recovered from Zone 2; one fragment of whiteware, one fragment of clear glass plate-molded bottle, and two large cut spikes. All artifacts appeared to be of late nineteenth to early twentieth-century manufacture. Zone 2 contained a large, flat stone which may have been used as a "sleeper" to support a porch or other construction (Figure 6). There was no evidence of an excavated hole to place the sleeper into, suggesting it was either a ground surface at one time, or that it had been placed there during soil deposition. Zone 2 continues to 0.65 feet below surface across the entire unit. Zone 3 is sterile yellow-brown clay. At 1.25 feet below surface the yellow clay was replaced across the entire unit by grey-brown sandy clay, similar to that above the rotting rock in Test 1. The grey-brown sandy clay continued to 1.65 feet below surface where it was replaced by yellow sterile clay. No archeological features were identified in Test Unit 2.

Figure 6: Photograph of Test 2 Showing Stone, View Looking North.

CONCLUSIONS

The archeological record associated with the lean-to addition of the Hoffman House is exceptionally complex, and only partially illuminated by the limited testing effort in support of construction of a single foundation wall. Three large, local disturbances have combined to create a confusing blend of redeposited soils; excavation and redeposition of soils from the basement, excavation and backfilling of the well, and excavation and backfilling of the cistern. Test Unit 1 possibly contains a portion of the well construction trench, if only the irregular margin. Test Unit 2 probably contains redeposited soil from the cellar which lies directly upon sterile clay.

Two results are clear; the proposed construction of a foundation wall for reconstruction of the lean-to addition will have no effect on archeological resources that contribute to the National Register eligibility of the property or the Hoffman House. Secondly, no artifactual evidence was discovered that would suggest that the House was constructed before the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The same is true for the cistern and well. Typically, areas around structures dating to the late-nineteenth century at Gettysburg National Military Park contain great quantities of artifactual materials. Although they often appear in a redeposited context, they are seldom absent. This was clearly not the case within the area proposed for reconstruction at the Hoffman House. The stratigraphic relationships in Tests 1 and 2 may be possibly explained by complete soil removal (or absence) from the area of the lean-to addition with subsequent backfilling of mostly sterile soils. It cannot be overemphasized that the investigations described in this report were designed only to assess the effect of the proposed reconstruction project, with the resulting information used as a preliminary and that investigations designed to the purpose of determining a definitive construction date for the Hoffman House would have a dramatically different result.